



## **Not So Little Moments by OTPGalore19**

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**Summary:** The Party have been through a lot in their adolescent years. Now, in the Fall of 1996, they've moved on from the Mindflayer and Hawkins. Living their own respective, and somewhat normal lives. Read as they embrace the not so little moments, and see those that lead them to where they are. Post Canon. Mileven, Lumax, and the Party being ride or dies!

## 1. I Love You More Than Baked Goods

*How we feeling after S3? Good? Bad? Like your heart was ripped out of your chest and tossed into the garbage disposal? Me too. Hopefully this cures you're Stranger Things/Mileven depression. I know mine was temporarily soothed while writing this.*

*Before you dive right in, I'd like to warn you about the level of fluff. HEART ATTACK inducing fluff. Tread carefully.*

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Bloomington, Indiana

September 14, 1996

Eleven leaned into the cushions of the lazy boy, sighing softly into her mug of herbal tea as she took a sip. Immediately, her insides warmed at the sensation and her face broke out into a pleasant smile as she soaked in every ounce of it: Happiness.

She remembered feeling puzzled hearing the term for the first time. Hopper had given it to her during one of their famous "Word of the Day" activities, and she had a particularly difficult time understanding the meaning. She had trouble grasping most words upon hearing them for the first time, but this one was different. No matter how many times she studied how it was spelled or defined, she could never **truly** relate to it like everyone else.

Eleven had never experienced being happy at the lab. All she ever felt there was fear, pain, loneliness, and guilt for opening the gate. She never expected to feel anything else, even after she ran from Papa and his bad men. Then, somewhere along her fight for freedom, she met *Mike*. A shy boy who gave her a home and his friendship. He showed her what it felt like to be **loved** for who she was. And ever since, she began developing a sense of what happiness meant to her.

It was Hopper and his commitment to making sure she was always safe, like an overprotective father watching over his daughter. It was the Party and their comradery, which was the glue that kept her together both during and after her battles with the Mind Flayer. It

was Mike Wheeler and his undying adoration for her, no matter how many times they were separated. It was-

A breathless giggle left Eleven's lips as a round of fluttering kicks pulled her out of her reverie. Her free hand slid over her swollen middle and stopped to rest over her left side, just a few inches away from her belly button.

"Hi, little one," she muttered affectionately, rubbing at the spot with her fingers, kneading the taut skin through the faded pink wool of her flannel.

*Her happiness was this baby. This little light she created with Mike, the love of her life.*

The news of her pregnancy had rattled her at first, mainly because she believed she was infertile after all the experiments Brenner had subjected her to. In those first few months, there were days where she was more anxious than Mike, who had nearly fainted when she handed him the ultrasound pictures. There were nights she had nightmares of her baby being taken from her, just like she was stolen from her own mother. But there was also an indescribable warmth that enveloped her when she heard his heartbeat for the first time, or whenever she felt him move, which had been happening a lot lately since she hit twenty weeks. And even though she still had those moments of fear, she never let it affect how much she was looking forward to this new chapter. Mike, however, didn't seem to see things from that perspective.

Eleven didn't doubt he loved the baby because he showed it in his actions. After getting over the shock, he had dived right into getting everything ready and reading up on what to expect. Before she knew it, the spare bedroom they had used as a storage space was flipped into a makeshift nursery. And he was **very** attentive to her needs, never holding it against her during her bouts of mood swings. Always willing to get up at the crack of dawn to fix a plate of her beloved waffles. But he was also nervous, and so stressed to the point where she was concerned he would overexert himself.

Some of that weight came from the anxiety of becoming a first-time father. The rest, or at least the majority of it, came from his eagerness

to make sure they would be taken care of. Mike had been working more in recent months than he did when he was still a student at MIT (which was surprising, considering all of the studying he did for his master's degree) and she had moved out to live with him off campus for his two years in grad school.

Once they had moved back to Indiana, they didn't have much trouble affording their studio when it was just the two of them. Especially once she started working at a cozy bookstore deep within the city called Cover 2 Cover. Lately, however, she had started working fewer days in preparation for her maternity leave. Therefore, at least until she recovered from having the baby, he was the primary breadwinner.

Eleven was gentle as she continued rubbing at the spots where she felt a kick. When they ceased, her hand flattened against her bump, and her gaze shot up to the entertainment center. Honey brown eyes latched onto the digital clock resting above the TV, watching the red numbers as time moved forward, leaving behind the hours of the morning.

It was noon, so she knew Mike was taking his lunch break before he started his second shift at work. Once he left - which wouldn't be until late in the afternoon - he would have about a forty-five minute drive home. So, she knew she had some time to figure out how she could take his mind off of the stress.

As she began racking her brain for ideas, her gaze moved toward the shelf stashed between the sliding glass door at her left and the entertainment center. Several books lined the five rows, and she scanned through the first three before she found it.

She set aside her tea and - with great effort - hauled herself up from the recliner with a soft grunt. The hand that rested flat against her bump had lowered to support it underneath as she trudged along, her feet shuffling across the room. She reached the bookshelf about a minute later. Both of her arms immediately reached out to the fourth shelf, fingers grasping onto the pastel yellow spine as she pulled it out.

The scrapbook settled in her grasp as she pulled it close with a rough

exhale, bracing it against the top of her protruded stomach. She beamed, warm nostalgia blooming from her core as her gaze swept over the cover, eyes quickly reading over the fine cursive. This was an item that reminded her of all the moments in her life she never wanted to forget, but it was also a pact she made with her friends before she had to leave Hawkins. A promise to document those times when they were happy, sad, or just wanted to remember.

Eleven had originally came up with the idea as a way for the rest of the Party to share the experiences she hadn't been around for. Some were like that, with one or more of them wanting to capture whatever happened for themselves. But others were memories they were all fortunate enough to share together. Those didn't happen as often as they liked, even after she had moved back.

The book opened with a soft sigh, the pages rustling quietly as they split apart. They were divided unevenly, with the right stack of paper looking starkly bigger in comparison to the left. But Eleven's focus wasn't on the contrasting size of the sides. Instead, her attention was on the picture on the right, taped near one corner of the page.

The little smile on her face reached her eyes, beaming as she found Mike. His expression brighter than hers, and a bit awkward as he faced the camera; white teeth glinting in a grin as he towered beside their kitchen island and over the large Rice Krispie cake. The exterior was smothered in chocolate frosting, and there were tiny candles scattered on top.

Eleven recalled the day she took the picture months ago. It was Mike's birthday, and they couldn't afford to buy an actual cake like his parents used to do for him each year. So, since obtaining a knack for cooking, she decided to bake him a cake. But not a traditional one, with the typical white or chocolate cake batter. No, it was made out of homemade Rice Krispie treats.

Mike had been *addicted* to them ever since they became popular last year. She would always find the metallic blue rappers in his lunchbox after he came home from work and would watch him buy a box whenever they were at the grocery store. He loved eating them just as much as she loved eating her Eggo's. Especially when she made them herself, which hadn't happened since his last birthday...

Suddenly, the lightbulb in her head lit up like the sun, and she closed her scrapbook with a soft clap before turning toward the kitchen. Her gaze found the trio of cabinets above the stove, but she focused on the one in the middle, her expression contorting in concentration. Seconds later, the small door swung open, exposing a stash of cereal to her line of sight. Particularly, a blue cardboard spine with the little elves she recognized as Snap, Crackle, and Pop.

*Later that afternoon....*

"C'mon, you piece of shit door," Mike grumbled with a grunt, fumbling as he twisted the key into the lock of the apartment door, the others on the ring jangling along.

His head was craned forward as he struggled to open the door. Combined with his shadow masking the door, the dark curls hanging from his mop of hair only worsened his limited sight, adding to his sour mood.

Mike's day - hell - his entire **week** was more intense than when he had first started at Andromeda Technologies: a rising company within the tech industry and the stepping stone in his career as a software engineer. There was a deadline he needed to meet next week and only a few days to polish up a prototype he had been working on for months. It was a software application that was supposed to protect computers from pesky viruses and combat against malware. He had no trouble writing it's code, or designing its user interface. Recreating the signatures, however, proved to be more difficult than he originally thought, especially with the limited resources he had to work with.

He was passionate about his job, and he was fortunate enough to have a natural knack for anything relating to science or mathematics. But his love for El was his motivation to push through each obstacle, both in his career and in his life. He endured everything thrown his way because she had the courage to do the same for nearly half her life. She was subjected to so much darkness before he had met her - and even afterward - that he was certain she deserved nothing but light for the rest of her lifetime. He promised he would help her see more of it when they tied the knot, and he planned on keeping that promise as long as he lived.

Finally, Mike heard the sharp click of the door unlocking as he turned the key for what felt like the billionth time. A sigh left him through his nose as he readjusted his hold on the backpack over his shoulder. His grip on the handle tightened as he twisted it to the left, putting pressure on the door as it opened.

As he stepped inside, a familiar warm rush of air enveloped him, and he felt some of the tension in his back ease. He was swift in retrieving the key and closing the door before another breeze of cold, stale air infiltrated his home.

Another exhale escaped through his mouth as he ran a hand through his hair, his fingers gravitating down the back of his neck.

Mike took a moment to soak in more of his surroundings before he took another step into the apartment, shaking his head as he heard his wife belt out the chorus of the *Spice Girls' Wannabe*. Then he kicked off his sneakers, turned to the coat stand at his right, and shrugged off his bag before attaching its loop around one of the hooks. He was about to do the same with his jacket - his left arm already out of the sleeve - when an aroma hit him like a freight train, triggering his sense of smell as he sniffed the air. It was sweet, like the vanilla perfume El used. But there were also hints of milk chocolate, butter, and a sugary scent he could readily associate with marshmallows.

"Rice Krispies?" He muttered to himself, squinting as he let his jacket slip from his shoulders, not caring when it fell to the floor.

When he finally turned around, he found El in the middle of their kitchen, her back turned to him. She was dancing in front of the oven, her head bobbing up and down as her hips swayed to the rhythm.

Mike took a few steps forward, his mind set on greeting her and closing the distance between them. However, as she turned toward the refrigerator, he could see the downward curve of her growing abdomen as it met the countertop.

He froze in his tracks, feeling his heart flutter against his chest as he stared breathlessly.



*She was glowing.*

Not as a result of the light fixtures screwed into the ceiling, even though they were on. No. El was a light all on her own, shining brighter than anything he had ever seen. She always was, but it became more apparent to him over the last handful of months. As her pregnancy progressed - and the slim belly he would kiss whenever they got intimate - swelled with their child. *His child.*

"If you wanna be my lover!" El sang the last line of the song, her shoulder length waves bouncing dramatically as she whipped her head to the side.

The youthful glint in her gaze was instantly replaced with surprise as she turned fully, eyes widening when she noticed her husband's presence.

"Hey, I didn't hear you come in," she greeted shyly over the radio as it cut to a commercial break, feeling her cheeks heat up.

He never failed to make her blush. Even after *thirteen* years.

Her words brought Mike out of his reverie, and his lips curled into a smirk, "Yeah? I wonder why."

The hues in El's red cheeks only deepened in response. But she beamed as he walked around the marble countertop, and she met him in the middle of their kitchen.

"Hi," she said again, shooting up on the tips of her toes as she reached for him, sleeved arms hooking over his shoulders, pulling him closer until her bump touched his abdomen.

Mike didn't say a thing as he bent down, pressing a tender kiss to her soft lips, his pale hands hugging her waist. Hearing a playful giggle against his mouth, he pulled away, his chocolate eyes opening to the sight of El staring up at him, her beautiful, honey irises observant underneath a pair of long eyelashes.

"How was work?" She asked softly, brushing back the fluffy curls away from his forehead.

"Good," he replied, his long fingers rubbing gentle circles into her side, "Project Guadware is almost done. I uh, just need to run a few more tests, make sure most of the cracks are filled."

El hummed, her eyebrows coming together as she absentmindedly played with the curly strands guarding the nape of his neck. She knew the general description of Mike's job, but - thanks to her late start in education - she still had trouble understanding the mathematical aspect of what he did. She had the basics of math locked down, but still struggled with the advanced stuff. Those grueling hours of studying it in high school gave her the ability to graduate and get her target SAT score; but it also turned her off from wanting to pursue a career in that particular field.

Reading and writing, however, were the subjects she had the most interest in. Despite how difficult it was to understand both at first, she grew to appreciate them whenever she employed them for personal use. Like when she started her collection of romance novels or when she would write little notes to Mike and their friends.

"I also have to ace the hell out of the presentation. Or else all my work will be for nothing. No pressure," Mike added with a dry scoff.

That pulled El out of her thoughts. She gave him a look, nodding as she held his gaze, "*You will*, Mike. I know it."

He blinked, his expression unreadable for a few moments. Then, his mouth stretched into a teasing smile, "So... does our daughter have a craving for Rice Krispie treats? Or is it really my birthday, and I just dreamt us celebrating before today?"

She shot him a glare, but it held no heat as she fought a smile, feeling his hands slide over to the sides of her swollen middle.

It was a game they had started playing early on in El's second trimester, and she decided that she didn't want to know their baby's sex until the birth. Mike had followed her lead since he cared more about the baby's health. But that didn't stop him from thinking they were having a girl despite her counterclaims on them actually having a boy, often using her recent knowledge of mother's intuition as a tool in their debates.

"*Our son*," El corrected, her non-threatening stare reduced to a pointed look as she heard him snort. "And yes, he likes them as much as Eggo's. But I made these for you."

Mike quirked up an eyebrow but allowed her to untangle from his embrace as she slid to the side and turned, with her hand meshing with his larger one as she lead him across their kitchen.

They stopped to stand in front of the oven, and his gaze swept over the two cookie sheets full of decorated rice bars. A mix of chocolate and vanilla, with some coated in icing and sprinkles.

"Holy- El, you didn't have to make all of these!" Mike observed after a few moments, gaping as he turned to her. "You know that I love your cooking, but I could have gotten another box on my way home. You didn't have to worry."

She looked up to meet his eyes, her own softening as she met his confused, dark irises.

"You worry about us, Mike," El uttered softly, laying a gentle hand on her bump. "I do too, but I worry more about you."

He blinked, the curves of his lips descending into a frown as he let her continue.

"You're stressed, and I wanted to help. I needed to, because I promised I would when we got married," she admitted with a shrug, like it was the simplest answer.

Mike was quiet for a few beats, taking an interest in their conjoined hands as he let her words sink in. Finally, he shook his head, a disbelieving scoff leaving his lips.

"You don't get it."

El met his gaze again, her brows furrowed as she tilted her head, "What?"

He turned to her, facing her fully as the rough pad of his thumb caressed the smooth skin of the back of her hand.

"Since the moment we met that night in the woods," Mike began softly as he took hold of her other hand, glancing down at the golden band wrapped around her ring finger, "all you have ever done is **help** me, El."

She froze, watching him unblinkingly as he pulled her closer, feeling the heat of his breath as he continued.

"Even when we were fighting, and I was being a total mouthbreather," he smiled, matching hers as it broke through her stunned expression. "Even when you're just here with me, and not doing anything else, you help. You make me better, and I could never thank you enough for it."

El blinked back the tears that began to form at his words, her hands slipping from his as she reached for his face, fingers brushing up against his stubble.

"I don't want thanks when I have you," she uttered, her words a soft whisper to Mike's ears.

They captivated him on a level so high, he could barely focus enough to reciprocate El's movements as she pulled him in, her lips warm against his. He kissed her deeper, more fervently than before as he found her waist again. Though he was mindful of their baby, making sure his grip wasn't too tight as his arms cocooned around her midsection, his hands meeting at the small of her back.

Time slowed down for Mike as the minutes passed, and all he could focus on was El. He didn't care that they were cutting it close to the time they usually partook in a "sitcom binge", settling down with a meal as she caught him up on *Boy Meets World* or *Friends*. He didn't pay attention to the radio as the first few lyrics of *Every Breath You Take* filled his ears, even though it was one of their songs. He couldn't care about those things because he was too enraptured with the woman in his arms.

Just like he had been on that life-changing night of **November 7, 1983**.

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*Good, you survived. Because this is just a stepping stone in what I have planned for the "Not So Little Moments" series. Stay tuned, and don't hesitate to let me know what you thought. And whether or not I made a complete mess out of Mike and El's characterization.*

*Also, for future reference (specifically for this and future 1996 chapters) I made a little fancast for The Party:*

*Mike Wheeler - Ezra Miller OR Adam Brody*

*Eleven/Jane Hopper - Natalie Portman*

*Max Mayfield - Scarlett Johansson*

*Lucas Sinclair - Michael B. Jordan*

*Dustin Henderson - Jonah Hill, Shia LaBeouf, or Jake Gyllenhaal*

*Will Byers - Leonardo DiCaprio or Tom Hiddleston*

## 2. A Sketch in the Right Direction

*Welcome back to the Not So Little Moments Series!*

*I'm so humbled from the positive feedback I received in Part 1. Hopefully I can keep up the momentum with this part and the ones that follow. This one was a bit difficult to write, seeing as though Eleven and Will really haven't interacted at all in the show. And it was hard to build most of it from scratch. But I wanted to stick with it, and I'm glad I did.*

*Like this one, the next handful of parts will be set in the past so I can start describing those "not so little moments". \*smirks\**

*Judging from the response I get, I might add in some stuff I predict will happen in S4. However, that won't be the heart of this series, and I would be keeping them at a minimum.*

*Enjoy! Though, as you read, I highly suggest having a glass of chocolate milk by your side.*

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*Toledo, Ohio*

*November 15, 1985*

*Eleven breathed deeply, loosening the iron tight grip around her knees as she leaned back, surrendering the job of keeping her upright to the wooden panel of her headboard.*

*She dreamt of Hopper again. Of his deep yet comforting voice, and that stretched, closed mouth smile he had always used around her. Ever since he died, she saw him every time she closed her eyes. That first week she had settled in with her and the boys, Joyce had told her it was a part of this process called grieving. It made sense once Eleven mulled over all of her trauma. And, for awhile, she no longer fretted whenever she saw him.*

*However, when the image of her father figure struck after what felt like hours since she closed her eyes - interrupting the peaceful darkness of her sleep - she was convinced it was something else. Because he didn't have the*

dried blood on his face like before, or the printed shirt with the wings on them. No. His appearance was different. Hauntingly different. He looked older with his unkempt beard and a head of long shaggy hair. But his deep blue irises were shining softly with a bright light despite the bags underneath them. The last time he had gazed at her like that was before they split up at Starcourt, and he convinced her to stay low while he fought for her. **Died for her.**

He felt... **real** this time. So real to the point Eleven was beginning to think this was a peace offering from the world for putting her through Hell. Or even a sign her abilities, which were something she hadn't been able to access in months, might be coming back to her. Though that thought made a part of her feel relieved - maybe even hopeful - it terrified the rest of her to the core. Because for the first time in all fourteen years of her life, she finally had some semblance of normalcy. Which only became a reality once she left Indiana.

It pained her sometimes whenever she thought about being away from her friends. From **Mike**. However, she had talked with at least one of them with her walkie, or traded letters if Cerebro was out of commission and their parents didn't want them to rack up the phone bill. Not to mention the fact that she was close enough for them to visit without it being a big inconvenience. She missed Hawkins, but it was just a reminder of how she suffered and what she lost despite the good packaged with it. Ottawa Hills was her clean slate, her chance to move on her with her life. And If her powers were coming back, so was the Mind Flayer and whatever messed up plan he had for her world.

Her past would flood back into the future she was already struggling to make for herself. That was the last thing she wanted, but she was more fearful of getting her hopes up. On feeding off of the idea that Hopper wasn't dead, only to have that door slammed into her face with proof that suggested the opposite down the road. No. She couldn't put herself through that pain again. She **refused** to put Joyce and everyone else through it.

Eleven sat up from her slouched position, glancing to the clock at her right. She groaned, realizing that she had slept for no more than a few hours. She was tired, but didn't want to experience another nightmare about someone she had lost. So, she figured fixing herself something to drink was a decent distraction, slipping out of her bed and strolling over to her bedroom door. Her hand grasped the handle, and she pulled it,

widening the three-inch crack as she took a step through the threshold.

She stood still for a few moments, rubbing the exhaustion from her eyes with her sleeve. After that, she took notice of how bright the end of the hall was in comparison to where she was. Squinting, she quietly continued her trek, her bare feet leading her down the corridor. She heard a sound as she walked, which only added to her rising suspicion. It sounded like a door slam, but softer. Like whoever carried out the action was mindful of the noise that would follow.

When she finally left behind her and Joyce's hallway - stopping to survey the conjoined room - her honey brown eyes ceased from their narrowed form once they found the kitchen. Specifically, the culprit standing in it.

She was seconds away from calling out to him, but Will cut off her train of thought as he met her gaze, freezing from behind the kitchen island with a carton of chocolate milk in his grasp.

No one said a word for a few moments. Then, he blinked away his shock and cleared his throat, slicing away at the uncomfortable silence, "I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't. I-" Eleven hesitated, wrapping her arms around herself in a snug hug. "I couldn't sleep."

Will only gave her a nod, blinking again before he resumed filling his cup.

While he did that, she took it upon herself to make her way over, her steps slow as they trudged into the living room, passing through the space between the table and the television set.

Once Eleven met him at the island, stopping beside the row of four stools guarding its exterior, he peered at her again. The look was not reciprocated with her opting to stare at the countertop. She missed the hints of understanding in them, the **sympathy**. A sharp contrast to the way he had looked at her seconds ago, and all of the other times they were in the same room and he had managed more than a glance in her direction.

"I have them too: nightmares."

Registering his words - and the genuineness radiating from them - Eleven



turned to him, her eyes significantly wider than before.

"I had them before... I disappeared," he continued softly, gulping down the anxiety that filled him at the memories, "But they were child's play compared to the ones I had after I came back. Instead of Freddy Krueger or a zombie, I **saw** the Upside Down. I saw myself getting possessed by the Mind Flayer all over again."

Will let out a pained breath, the puff of air trembling its way out of his mouth as he set the milk carton down, letting it thud against the ironwood. "And now, I see Jonathan telling me that my mom didn't make it... Sometimes it's just her. Sometimes it's both her and Hop-"

He caught himself before he could finish, but not before watching Eleven as she shrunk in on herself, tilting her head down and away from his eyes. Her arms latched back around her once again, which appeared similar to the way she held herself before. And it only made him feel worse about opening up an old wound.

Will knew the gruff - and at times brash - police chief for as long as he could remember. But he never knew him like his mother did. And he didn't have to rely on him for protection and care, like the timid girl standing before him, who was still avoiding his gaze. Just like those first few weeks of processing that her father figure wasn't coming back.

Things between them were still in a... **strange** place. They were better than they were when Eleven had first moved in that Monday after Starcourt, which felt more tense with the grief added in. Will accepted his share of responsibility in that, seeing as though his issues with Mike still stained his mind, despite his want to keep their friendship. It was easier to blame her for that since she had been the source of the problem after all. Additionally, she literally lived in the same house, so he did his best to avoid her - his tactics a mix of limiting the amount of eye contact, avoiding conversation, or simply ignoring her as they walked in the same vicinity.

It worked well enough until the weeks passed, and Will came to realize something very important about Eleven: she was **genuine** to a fault. Whether it was with actions or words from her growing vocabulary, she was honest about almost everything. Especially her feelings, which seemed to focus more on him and their strain since they had left Hawkins. She

*made several attempts on rebuilding that bridge and was very persistent in getting to the bottom of what was wrong while he shoved it all under the rug, pretending like it never existed. She cared, and once he was able to truly understand that, he was willing to let go of those negative feelings.*

*Though Will's gesture didn't alleviate the tension still lingering as quickly as he had hoped, it was a start. And what he was going to say next took it a step further.*

*"Yeah nightmares, they uh- they suck. But I've found ways to take my mind off of them when I'm awake and don't want to go back to sleep."*

*His last sentence brought Eleven out of her shell, and she turned to him again, her unkempt waves sliding to one side as she tilted her head., "What ways?"*

*Will did his best to hide his amusement at her enthusiasm, but a smile slipped through his wall, illuminating his umber irises.*

*"Well, first I get something sweet. Nothing too sugary, just something to help fend off the drowsiness. Like this," he poked the side of the carton with the tip of his forefinger. "Want some?"*

*Wordlessly, Eleven gave her consent with a nod, recalling that a drink was the reason she came to the kitchen in the first place. A soft exhale left her once she slid into the nearest stool, watching as Will turned his back from her and went to retrieve another cup from the cupboard.*

*"Then I do something to pass the time. Like a hobby, but nothing that could wake up Mom or Jonathan," he continued over his shoulder, and her expression grew pensive as she thought about examples of what she'd seen him do in his free time.*

*Reading fantasy novels written by someone named J. R. R. Tolkien came to mind, but there was also something else. Something that - for whatever frustrating reason - had a name she couldn't place. At least until she glanced to her left, practically ignoring the two seats standing between her and the opened book bag as its contents caught her narrowed gaze. Particularly, the camouflage skin of his sketchbook.*

*"Like drawing," she observed, the words falling from her lips in a distant*

whisper, "I don't think that's **my** hobby. I'm not good at it."

Will strode back to her in just a few steps, her declaration prompting him to spare a sheepish glance her way, his hand shooting up to the back of his neck as the other sat her cup down, "I wasn't that great either when I started. You just need more practice."

Eleven just shrugged one shoulder and helped herself, plucking the carton from the counter while her other hand latched around the clear side of her cup, the bottom of it scraping against the wood as she pulled it toward her.

"Seriously. I was terrible at it," Will insisted, his features twisting into a brief grimace, "but I kept doing it, especially when I didn't feel like it. Now, instead of multicolored blobs and scribbles, I can draw the outside of our house. Or the shoreline by Lake Erie."

He paused, pressing his lips together as he turned slightly to his right, his eyes narrowing as he found his bag. "I can teach you, if you want."

Eleven froze just as she finished pouring her serving of milk, the carton in her grasp easing as she let it land next to her filled cup. Soon enough she recovered, but didn't meet his gaze, opting to stare into the dark depths of her beverage instead.

"It could be anything," Will offered sheepishly., "As long as it - you know - helps."

Several beats of silence served as her response, until she broke out of her reverie and looked up, shooting him a wary glance and asking, "Can I... can I draw Mike?"

Will paled, feeling like his heart was going to plummet into his stomach. He tried not to show it in his expression, but failed miserably. All he could do was gawk, frozen in place, his eyes as wide as a pair of saucer plates.

"He was there when I had them before. And I wasn't scared. Joyce helped too, but I don't want her to worry. Not this time," Eleven explained, averting herself from his wide-eyed stare.

He didn't offer a reply, so she straightened in her seat with a frown, small hands winding around her arms and cradling both elbows as she

dejectedly added, "Nevermind. It's stupid."

Her words triggered Will out of his daze, but not because of how she said it. It was **what** she said that brought him back to reality, and him realizing that he actually sympathized with the idea of finding comfort in Mike. He did it himself sometimes, recalling the little adventures they had whenever he was in a dark place and nothing else he could imagine helped.

"It's not stupid," Will finally objected, the last bit of shock melting from his features as he revealed, "I do it too."

Not even a minute passed between Eleven avoiding his gaze before she looked up again, just as fast. Her warm, honey brown eyes blinked back the surprise, "You do?"

He nodded. "I haven't tried drawing him though. So, I guess we're both new at this."

Then, for what felt like the first time since she had known him, Will Byers smiled. A genuine - and maybe a bit shy - smile beamed her way. Unforced, not a single hint of coldness. Only warmth, and Eleven couldn't help but reciprocate the expression, hers just as kind and inviting.

**Later that morning...**

Joyce struggled to stifle a yawn as she stepped into the hallway, the hand over her mouth useless against her lips as her inhale softly slipped through. Her footsteps were lazy as she passed the bathroom and pushed on toward Eleven's bedroom, trudging down the hall until she stopped in front of the door... which was **wide** open. The complete opposite of how Eleven usually had it closed.

That sobered her up, but there was still some grogginess left in her system as she peered into the room, expecting to find the bed occupied when it was empty instead. Then the worry began filtering its way through, erasing any feeling of tiredness as she did a brief scan for the familiar head of hazelnut curls.

She did her best to make sure Eleven was as comfortable as possible, but she was still getting used to having another kid to look after. Not that she

*mindful, because she didn't. She knew how awful the girl's life was before, and she wanted to do anything she could to make things better. She just didn't expect it all to happen so fast. Not without-*

*... Not without **Hopper**.*

*Joyce clenched her jaw and swallowed the lump in her throat. She turned from the doorway and resumed her trek down the hallway, her feet picking up their previous pace in the process.*

*Thoughts of what she would say to the girl she was beginning to see as a daughter plagued her mind as she walked, and she had some sort of comforting speech strung together once she reached the end. Though, within seconds of catching sight of her new surroundings, those words didn't seem to matter as she froze. They were quickly sealed away and set aside for another time, because there was a more... **immediate** matter capturing her undivided attention.*

*About six feet away, in the compact area sufficing as the living room, lay the two youngest members of the house. They were asleep, and judging from the relaxed expression on their faces, it was a peaceful slumber. Something they all had been lacking lately.*

*Joyce strolled in and made her way over, stopping to stand beside the navy blue sofa. Her dark eyes first darted down to her boy's cocooned form, her features softening as she reached down to carefully smooth back a stray strand of hair from his face. After, she took in more of the area, her gaze shooting over to the cluttered table, she took note of the scattered colored pencils and the sheets of scratch paper stained with little sketches. At a closer glance, a few looked to be features of a person. But before she could piece together **whom** they belonged to, she heard a soft grunt from her left.*

*She turned toward the reclined La-Z-Boy just as Eleven let out another heavy snuffle, the breathy sound more drawn out than the last snore. She was on her stomach, one arm keeping her head from sliding off of the backrest while her other limbs lay stretched out like a starfish. Her position was a sharp contrast to Will's, who was huddled like a ball underneath his covers.*

*Her eyes were also hidden underneath disheveled, chestnut curls, and*

*Joyce had another itch to brush them away. But she ignored it, opting to just stand still, her lips curling into a soft smile. While she watched them sleep - noting the shift in Eleven's exhales as they began to even out into regular breaths - she fully succumbed to the peacefulness of this moment.*

*She held on for as long as possible, knowing for certain that this was a rare sight. Her gut told her it wouldn't last, that its chances of occurring as often as she liked were slim. But she kept a firm grip anyway, too determined to let this image slip from her fingers.*

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***I hope you liked my interpretation of El and Will's relationship!***

***As always, please be sure to let me know what you thought in the comments section below. To keep an eye out for updates on future parts, my handle on Instagram is extraordinary\_fangirl, so feel free to follow me on there if you want.***